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VOLUME VI NUMBER 5

THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

JANUARY, 1906

L'ECOLE DES ROCHES

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Director

I. HISTORICAL

L'Ecole des Roches (literally, The School of the Rocks, from its nearness to a rocky cliff,) has been organized to answer the expressed wishes of a great number of heads of families little satisfied with the actual methods of education and instruction in French secondary schools. The program of the new school was set forth in November, 1898, in a volume styled *The New Education; The School of The Rocks.* The success of this volume prepared the way for the rapid success of the school. In fact, in January, 1899, the first pupils registered went to take a course of study in England or Germany, while awaiting the opening of the school. After Easter a second group of twenty pupils went to join the first. At the beginning of October of the same year L'Ecole des Roches, with fifty pupils, was opened in the House of Vallon, a building rapidly constructed. The school is situated in the domain of Roches, near Verneuil, Normandy; it is on the main road which leads from Paris to Granville, two hours from Paris. This domain, the extent of which is actually fifty acres, included at that time the Chateau of Roches, large commons, woods, prairies, and cultivated grounds.

The demands for admission being greatly increased, it was necessary to construct immediately a new house, that of the Pines. The opening of the House of the Pines took place at the beginning of October, 1900, one year after that of Vallon. At that time the school accommodated one hundred pupils, divided between two houses, having a distinct administration. In the course of the same year, in response to still greater demands, it was necessary to open a new house, La Giuchardière; then, in the following year, two others, Le Coteau and Les Tablans.

These five houses are grouped around a special building destined for the use of classes, and where there are also the chapel and the large assembly hall of the school. There are two isolated houses designed for infirmaries, and others for the machinery, electricity, carpentry, drawing, polishing shop, chemistry, laboratory, etc.

In bringing to this institution not only their moral but financial help, the founders of L'Ecole des Roches have given a great example, in that they have shown the power of private initiative. The development of the school was made by the construction of distinct houses around the central school building, and not by the enlargement of the houses. From now on, whatever may be the number of pupils in the future, we shall always avoid the danger of congestion. Every dwelling-house possesses a large measure of autonomy, being presided over by a principal, assisted by a lady and by several other professors. There the children take their meals, sleep, and have their study classes. It is truly a home, from which the children are sent to a day school situated in the vicinity.

This type of school avoids at the same time the inconveniences of the boarding-school and those of the day school. It avoids the confinement and the strict regulations of the boarding-school, because the children live in small numbers in the home of a professor. It avoids the carelessness, the loss of time, the crossing of the tracks, and the unhealthy sojourn in the city which the day school necessitates. This kind of school will find favor in France, and will be successful by its educational virtues. Its influence was first manifested by the volume *The New Education.* After the great parliamentary inquiry upon scholastic reform, the Educational Commission directed by M. Ribot, the eminent statesman, asked for some of the modifications which are now realized in Roches. Our school has had only four years of existence, and, thanks to the irresistible force of example, it has compelled the university to try certain improvements modeled after our program and our methods.

To remain at the head of the movement which we have so happily inaugurated, we must continually strive to improve our course of study, because this plan is our only reason for existence. One of the first improvements was found to be the study of science, not upon a theoretical presentation, as is the case everywhere in France, but upon practical work in the laboratory, begun in the lower classes and continuing throughout the school. It is only by this means that one can impart at the same time a taste for, and a serious knowledge of, science. The usefulness of this method of instruction will be understood if one considers that science has an increasing importance, not only in examinations, but in the daily life. A young man whose scientific knowledge is not only theoretical, but practical, will be the more needed and better remunerated since all our French schools produce exclusively theoretical men.

We have, besides, perfected our methods in physical culture and general hygiene, being inspired by the progress made in certain countries of Europe, especially in the schools of Sweden. This struggle must be undertaken methodically, and with all the resources of a better science of living.

II. THE GENERAL LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Before speaking of the general life of L'Ecole des Roches, it seems desirable to give to our American readers a view of the type of the high-school teacher against whom our school protests. He lives with his family away from school; he comes only to attend the class; he takes his chair and lectures from there; and when the bell has rung that announces the end of the class, he leaves his chair and hurries to his home in the city. If the professor is a churchman, he hastens to his room. During the class-hour the professor has in front of him, at a considerable distance, an assembly of children. He has not, he cannot have, personal communication with them. The actual system creates no communication between the teacher and the pupils.

The monitors have more communication with the pupils, but generally of a disagreeable nature. These monitors are lodged at the school, it is true, but their permanent presence has for its excuse the need of continual watching. In fact, when so large a number of children are left to themselves by the absence of the teacher, it is necessary to inspire them with fear and to use punishments in order to secure obedience. The monitor is charged with this necessary but unenviable rôle. He has no serious authority over the children; he does not teach them; he has only the power to punish them.

Thus abandoned by his two educators, the pupil takes refuge in himself, and has no other resource than to turn toward his classmates. He finds an education in the invention of a thousand tricks by means of which he can outwit the vigilant monitor and rid himself of oppression. Naturally the prestige among the pupils goes to those who are more stubborn in resistance to authority; to those who are more skilful than others in running away from the guards, and in the invention of tricks. In the end authority rules and the pupils suffer. To re-establish the equilibrium of the situation, they take refuge in dissimulation and lying. This outcome is precisely the result of the scholastic régime all over France, and this is one of the reasons why the French school does not make men, because a man must never lie. Lying is not only a low vice, it is a proof that one is feeble and timid. A pedagogical system which inculcates the habit of dissimilution is condemned without any possible appeal.

In L'Ecole des Roches one meets neither such a professor nor such a monitor. Their functions exist, but in a type which is very different. Our teachers make their homes at the school, and take their meals together with the pupils in the common dining-room, where every table has ten pupils presided over by a teacher. In fact, if the professor is married, his wife has a function in the school, be it as a teacher or as domestic administrator. These teachers live from morning to evening with the pupils, not to watch them, but to educate them. They take a part in all their exercises — not only class exercises, but also games.

This long-continued contact between teachers and pupils has for its first effect the establishment between them of relations which much resemble those of a father toward his children — a father, who would take part equally in their studies, in their plays, in their everyday life. In this way is obviated the isolation of the child who has no other resource than the society of his comrades. The school, consequently, gives the impression of a real and complete life.

The character of the school is partly shaped by the presence of women teachers. It is believed that to attempt to educate a child without the presence and care of a woman is absurd. The presence of a woman is conducive to better manners. She introduces social habits into the school, and keeps the pupils away from mischief; and the young boy so educated is prepared to meet properly the feminine element in society after leaving school.

I must mention, in this connection, the moral influence of physical exercise and outdoor life. In our French scholastic system we try to lessen moral evils by moral and religious advice, whose effect is unfortunately lowered by the rigorous life to which the children are subjected, and by the supposition that they always do wrong. The best moral adviser is an active life, which creates an energetic disposition by wholesome physical fatigue during the day, and by a more profound sleep during the night. The manual training and the games, which exercise all parts of the body, the daily cold showers, and the frequent baths have a fine moral effect. By these means, and still more by appointing captains from among the oldest pupils, the teacher's task is made easier.

The school is, in fact, given to the care of the pupils; it is their task; they are responsible for its order and its cleanliness. The confidence and respect shown them develop self-respect and self-confidence. I do not think that there exist any more efficient means to build up men.

It is to reach this result that the teachers are in such continual contact with the children. For this reason also the older pupils are given some control over the younger ones, that they may influence them for good. The authority thus delegated creates a state of mind which stimulates everyone to advance himself rapidly. Even the smallest details are so arranged as to give to even the youngest of the children the sentiment that they are men. Thus the children never have that falsely humble attitude toward their teachers which exists so commonly in our country. To tell the truth, this latter is a necessity of our ordinary system of education, because we cannot maintain an unnatural régime among hundreds of children by simply displaying the flag of authority and suppressing every desire for independence. "Your son is humble and obedient"—this is the best praise which a French teacher can give to a pupil. Our ambition is to make strong boys, independent in character, and masters of themselves—boys capable of standing the hardships of life, and even of outgrowing them.

III. THE PROGRAM OF STUDY

The fullest details of our program of study are set forth in the volume, *The New Education.* We limit ourselves to giving here some general indications: In the classical instruction, Latin and Greek occupy most of the time of the children, while they neglect other and more important studies. In spite of that, the pupils know neither Latin nor Greek. Jules Lemaitre has said: "A master of arts is a brave young man, who knows neither Latin nor Greek, and who, in turn, does not know any better the living languages, nor geography, nor the natural sciences. He is a monster, a marvel of nothing." We have adopted for the study of ancient languages the most practical and rapid methods used for the study of living languages. The pupil prepares the text by the aid of a translation, and he explains it afterward in the schoolroom without the help of a dictionary. He can, therefore, prepare by this means several pages from the text, instead of some lines only. He thus memorizes many more words and phrases, which is the most essential point. When a pupil has read and understood—which, of course, is easy with a translation book—ten or twelve volumes of Latin, he will know Latin. The rules of syntax are disclosed here and there, as they need to be applied in the explanation of texts, thus facilitating the study of grammar.

This method is more rational, more practical, and at the same time more rapid. We begin the study of Latin in the fourth year — that is to say, when the child is able to progress rapidly in a study which needs reflection. This program has an advantage which will be appreciated by all parents. The child who enters the sixth grade knows absolutely nothing about the profession he will take up, and his parents do not know his tastes and his abilities. Nevertheless, when the child is only eight or nine years old, it must be decided whether he is to take the classic or the modern course. The future of the child is at stake, as in this way certain careers are closed to him forever. This is a matter of grave responsibility for the heads of families, and to it much thought is given. For the children it is a terrible limitation. On the contrary, if these decisions are postponed until the child is in the fourth grade, the parents can decide more intelligently, because they know the tastes and the abilities of the children which have then begun to manifest themselves clearly.

The time gained from Latin leaves about twenty study hours every week up to the fifth grade; in other words, about half of the time of the pupil. This time is used for French, for modern languages, for mathematics, geology, botany, zoölogy, physics, and chemistry, which are more or less neglected in the present system of instruction, in spite of their great and incontestable importance. For the living languages we have adopted the most efficacious method: All our pupils go to spend three months, six months, or a year in England or in Germany, in our corresponding schools. These sojourns are made between the fourth and the eighth grades, thanks to the time saved from Latin during this period. In four years we have sent to England and Germany about one hundred and seventy pupils, who stayed from three months to a year. When they come back, they understand and speak English and German. The study of the languages is facilitated by use. During the meals the pupils are distributed at tables, where either English or German is spoken. It is in this way that both these languages are used at the school.

A bachelor of arts often knows absolutely nothing about geology, botany, and zoölogy; his knowledge of the most common plants is so meager as to be absurd. Of physics and chemistry he knows little. He has only the first notions, acquired in haste usually a day before the examination, during the year devoted to philosophy. He ignores nature in its different and splendid manifestations. The world is for him as if it were not. This lack is so much the more unfortunate because the children, even the youngest, take an extraordinary interest in these studies, when they are taught practically and with intelligence.

The study of natural science in L'Ecole des Roches has for its starting-point direct observation. This is easy of achievement, as the school is situated in the country and the children can gather a great number of species from the mineral, animal, and vegetable kingdoms. Besides, the life, habits, and external parts of an animal are studied before the internal organs and the skeleton; the forms and construction of the plants, before their classification; the names and appearance of the stars and planets, before the laws of their movements. The afternoon excursions furnish opportunity for observation, and for gathering plants or insects, which are afterward carefully disposed and classified by the pupils themselves. Science becomes more natural, more comprehensible, more attractive, is better retained in memory, and is better assimilated. This study does not leave the distaste that often results from our exclusive methods. It gives the desire to extend one's knowledge, even after leaving college, thanks to the very lively interest awakened by actual contact and experiment.

These studies are valuable to the children from other points of view. The out-of-door exercise, under the stimulus of an adequate motive, and the gathering together in groups, are equally important features of the science lessons. To raise children between four walls, and under a rigorous régime that would be unhealthy even for old men, is a ridiculous and absurd proceeding, against which public indignation must be roused. Therefore the program of the school accords to natural science, physics, and chemistry about five hours per week in the lower classes, without counting the hours given to the same studies in the laboratory or during the excursions. Thanks to the time taken from that usually given to the ancient languages, we could go ahead with

French, the sciences, and the spoken languages from the fourth to the seventh grade. The children who begin their studies at Roches arrive at the fourth grade in less than a year, and in these studies are ahead of the pupils of other schools. We have been aided, in our desire to strengthen the classical studies, by the sympathetic help which we have received from the most eminent representatives of the university. They have allowed us to recruit from the faculty of the university professors who are willing to co-operate with us in our attempts at pedagogic reform.

IV. PRACTICAL WORK AND SPORTS

The several studies which we have just enumerated take up the whole morning and a part of the afternoon. The second part of the afternoon, from two to four o'clock, is devoted to practical work which is the direct outcome of the theoretical work, the plays, and the physical exercise. The pupil must not learn merely from books; he has much more to study than books. The instruction must not be only theoretical, it must be at the same time practical. Moreover, the child cannot be locked up the larger part of the day; he must have fresh air and exercise for his development. The children derive, indeed, much pleasure from this work, and acquire a great variety of knowledge; their intelligence is awakened, developed, and trained; it becomes more comprehensive.

The practical work contains several divisions.

1. *Gardening.*— Every well-informed man must know at least the elementary facts concerning the life-histories of plants and domestic animals. This is necessary for him not only in the event of his being occupied later with some such rural enterprise as the supervision of work on an agricultural estate, but these accomplishments are useful even to those who take up the liberal professions. Our bachelors of arts are indeed too ignorant about the most elementary things of rural life, as we often have occasion to observe when they are compelled to write or to speak on this subject. The politician and the clergyman must also have some acquaintance with the great agricultural interests which they compromise so often on account of an inexcusable ignorance.

L'Ecole des Roches, installed in the middle of a domain of about fifty acres, contains different grounds and various plantations, and is admirably located for the purpose of teaching the children the work of gardening and cultivation.

2. *The wood- and iron-work.*— This work, of course, does not aim to make carpenters or blacksmiths, but to develop in the child ability, and a skilful hand, so that he can in every contingency, no matter on what occasion or for what purpose, make use of this marvelous instrument, the hand. It goes without saying that this is an essentially healthful exercise, which strengthens the child, because it demands a certain expenditure of physical power. Much more, the resistance that these substances oppose develops in the child the habit of patience and perseverance in the work undertaken. Finally, the wood and iron, which are the most common materials employed by the people for general uses, can be modeled to different forms, thus devloping taste and the artistic powers.

A large shed is devoted to the woodwork. The pupils have at their disposal sixteen benches. They work under the direction of a professor who is a specialist, and of a carpenter of the school. The iron-work is taught in a foundry situated in the neighborhood of the school, under the direction of an engineer of arts and manufactures, who teaches also mechanics, physics, and chemistry. Thus this instruction is at the same time theoretical and practical.

3. *Visiting of farms and factories; collection of minerals, plants, and animals; land-surveying; treating of plans; etc.*— This kind of instruction has great importance, for it puts the child in direct contact with the different industries of real life. The regions about L'Ecole des Roches is well suited for this purpose, because it is at the same time agricultural and industrial. In regard to industrial visits our region is particularly favored.

Factories are established on the majority of the streams; several in line on the open field, using hydraulic and steam-power. One can therefore make varied observations from the mechanical point of view. The observations are not less varied from the point of view of manufacturers, or output. On a single river, the Stan, one arm of which encircles the neighboring village of Verneuil, we find the following: four sawmills, two forges, three tanyards, a brass and copper foundry, metal-plating works, two wire-drawing mills, a nail-forge, four hardware factories, two pin factories, one for the making of fine tools, a buckle factory, a sauce-pan factory, four construction workshops, several iron-polishers, five cleaning-places, two spinning-mills, a felt factory, eight fulers, a dye factory, a paper factory, a mustard factory, three elevators, and an electrical workshop. It is seen that this region contains a great variety of factories, which are so many object-lessons for the pupils.

By visiting methodically some of these workshops, the children can follow the successive transformations which the mineral, vegetable, and animal products undergo. Is there a study more necessary, more instructive, and more capable of interesting even the younger children? What they learn in this way they will never forget, and this experience reveals tastes and powers in the children which, without it, would remain poor or would be stifled. The children profit by these excursions across the fields, by collecting minerals, plants, or animals. These collections, arranged in order by each pupil, supplement in the most practical way the lessons in geology, botany, and natural science. Surveying and the execution of plans supplement similarly the lessons in arithmetic, geometry, and drawing. The principles thus carried out become a part of their lives, and help them to understand better what usefulness means.

We have organized two workshops, the polishing and modelling, in which the children take great interest. With the practical work is alternated physical exercises, especially football and the different winter sports. In summer the children play cricket and tennis, ride their bicycles, and row. The river Stan, which runs in the vicinity of the school, can be crossed without danger by small boats. The exercise of rowing, which develops the arms and the chest, supplements the exercises which develop the limbs. The small fleet of the school is just as necessary a part of the plan as it is a pleasant addition. Thus the various studies have for effect the giving of wings to all the faculties of the mind; and the great variety of physical exercises have for their aim to develop all parts of the body. A well-thought-out plan of education must neglect neither the mind nor the body. We must sacrifice neither the body to the mind nor the mind to the body, but must establish between the two a just and fair equilibrium. The school must develop breadth of intelligence and breadth of chest at the same time.

A part of the evenings is devoted to musical and literary meetings, and to social recreation. We wish to make social men—men efficient in the world. We want to differentiate them from the sad and awkward collegian. The young men must be neither awkward nor timid, but able to adapt themselves to the society of older people without shyness and with real enjoyment. They gather often in the parlor, where they meet the ladies of the school, and strangers who come to visit us. These evenings are devoted to the reading of selected pieces, to recitations or dramatic representations, to wood-carving or modeling, to dancing, or to lectures with stereopticon views. On Sundays the pupils attend religious services, or a moral lecture. We do not present religion to the children as if it were apart from life, but like an organic and harmonious whole, which must penetrate the individual entirely and direct all his actions. The school tries to help effectively, and to continue the teachings of, the minister, to whom the children are confided for their religious instruction. There are in the school both a Catholic priest and a Protestant pastor.

V. PROGRAM

6:00 Rising, bath, dressing, prayer.
6:25 Study.
7:25 First breakfast, very substantial.
7:40 Free time; the pupils make their beds.
8:00 First class.
9:05 Second class.
10:05 Free time.
10:20 Third class.
11:20 Fourth class.
11:30 Lunch.
1:00 Free time.

2:00 Plays, football, or cricket, according to the season; laboratory; excursions in natural science; modeling, carpentry, gardening, or music, according to the classes and the days.
3:00 In the cloakroom.
4:00 Tea.
4:30 Study or class.
7:00 Dinner.
7:30 Free time.
8:00 Study.
8:45 Prayer, and bed-time.

VI. THE STAY IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

The visits of our pupils to England and Germany are one of the greatest successes of the school. The results are indeed better than we had expected. The children make these stays from the beginning of their school-life. Thanks to these methods, they begin to speak a foreign language after three or six months. Most of the children who are now at the school have already made a stay in a foreign country. This enables them to succeed in speaking English and German. When we inaugurated these stays at the beginning of the school, we were afraid to meet resistance on the part of the parents, especially of the mothers. Today we have won the case. Sometimes it is necessary to moderate the ardor of the parents, who are disposed to prolong the stays of the children beyond the necessary time. The most of the children leave between the ages of eight and ten years. This is the most favorable age. At this age the child learns the languages best and most rapidly, and obtains this important result without any serious neglect of his other studies. We could appreciate the results obtained, if we were to read in the *New Education* the extracts which were addressed to us by parents or children.

VII. PRACTICAL INFORMATION

1. *Situation of the school.*—The school is situated in a region of level land, having an altitude of fifty meters, which gives it particularly favorable conditions from the hygienic point of view. The buildings of the school are erected in the middle of a property of fifty acres, composed of a park, prairies, cultivated grounds, and fir woods. The school has the best improvements and the best

hygienic conditions. A system of steam circulation, with a low pressure, has been adopted for heating the buildings. Electric lighting is used. The electric force is produced in an annex building, and kept in accumulators; it moves also the water-pumps and the various accessories of the washhouse. The school is in itself a real workshop of scientific demonstrations — all the more because all these installations are made by a teacher of the school, the engineer of arts and manufactures, detailed to teach mechanics, physics, and chemistry. The school is in direct communication with the different parts of France by telephone and telegraph. The station at Verneuil is a junction reached by four lines of railroad.

2. *Object of the school.*— The school has for its object to educate men as rapidly as possible, from the moral, intellectual, and physical points of view. It endeavors to develop the love for work, which is made more successful and more attractive; the sentiment of responsibility, of respect, self-control, and the habit of energy. We wish to create good-will, and sound bodies and souls. This school is a classical and modern institution, but having a new course of study adapted to the child's nature and to the necessities of instruction. This course of study permits the pupils to prepare for the bachelor's degree, for entrance into different schools, or to take up directly agriculture, colonization, industry, or commerce.

3. *The division of the school year.*— The school year is divided into three terms, each of three months. Pupils are admitted at the beginning of each term. The year has three vacations: Christmas and Easter, about three weeks each; and in August and September, two months. Weekly and monthly vacations are not allowed. This division in three periods, with the suppression of the weekly and monthly vacations, gives real advantages. On the one hand, they do not interrupt school-life very frequently; on the other, these longer stays at home separate less completely the child from his family. He remains there long enough every time to receive an influence. Thus the family-life and the school-life remain associated, the more so as this type of school is really organized on the family plan.